

TRIBUTE TO GLENN POSHARD

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to thank Dr. Glenn Poshard for his years of public service to Illinois.

Today, Dr. Poshard will be stepping down as president of Southern Illinois University, a position he has held with honor and distinction for more than 7 years. Under his leadership, Southern Illinois University has been able to keep tuition costs low and the university's finances sound, despite financial problems that have plagued the State.

Dr. Poshard has dedicated his life to working for the people of southern Illinois. In 1984, he was appointed to the Illinois State Senate until the people of the 22nd Congressional District sent him to the United States House of Representatives in 1989. I was fortunate to serve with Dr. Poshard for 8 years in the House of Representatives, where he was a strong proponent of campaign finance reform. Due to his commitment to reform, he limited individual donations to his gubernatorial campaign in 1998 and refused to accept contributions from political action committees.

Following his tenure in Congress, Dr. Poshard and his wife, Jo, founded the Poshard Foundation for Abused Children. For the last 14 years, the Poshard Foundation has worked to help abused, abandoned, and neglected children in southern Illinois.

After a 40 year affiliation with Southern Illinois University, Dr. Poshard is leaving his alma mater in good shape. He retires as the second longest-serving president in the history of the Southern Illinois University system, an experience he calls "the greatest honor of my life."

I congratulate Glenn on his outstanding career and thank him for his dedicated service to the people of Illinois. I wish him and his family all the best.

AFGHANISTAN AND UKRAINE SECURITY

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I just returned from a trip to Afghanistan and Ukraine where I reviewed the security situation in each country as chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

In each country, I met with military leaders and with civilian leaders and representatives of civilian society. The overwhelming impression I came away with is that American leadership remains critical, that others who are struggling for democracy and freedom see us as an essential friend and ally, and support for those who share those values must remain a cornerstone of our foreign policy and as essential to our own security.

In Afghanistan, I met with senior leaders of both our military and the Afghan military, including General Dunford, the commander of U.S. and coalition forces, and Afghan Minister of Defense Mohammedi. They reported that the transition of security responsibility to the Afghanistan National

Security Forces—ANSF—has gone even better than we had hoped, with no significant loss of security in the country despite the withdrawal of tens of thousands of American and coalition troops. U.S. and Afghan leaders alike expressed satisfaction with the ability of the newly built and much larger ANSF to successfully protect the Afghan people, to defeat Taliban forces in combat, and to secure a series of major public events, culminating in the April 5 Afghan presidential election.

Our military commanders emphasized that while these gains reflect the growing confidence of the Afghan security forces in their ability to provide security to the Afghan people, the challenge ahead is to put in place the final pieces needed to make the progress of the last decade sustainable. This includes logistics, maintenance, airlift, and building the institutions of the Afghan Army and police. Fundamental to any long-term effort on our part in Afghanistan will be the signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement as soon as possible with a new Afghan president. While President Karzai remains unreliable and his rhetoric offensive, all the major Afghan presidential candidates, including the two winners of the first round, support what we have done so far and look forward to signing the BSA promptly if elected.

In addition to meeting with the three leading presidential candidates, I met with Afghan government officials and with several groups of representatives of Afghan civil society. The Afghans I met with came from different backgrounds and spoke with different voices, but they shared a common message of pride in the achievement of their country as it has rebuilt and recovered from the devastation of decades of civil war and Taliban rule. They pointed to the revival of Afghanistan's education and health systems, the dramatic improvement in the role of women in the country, and the new life that the last 10 years have brought to the country's economy.

They also spoke of their frustration with the exceedingly negative picture of events in Afghanistan depicted in the U.S. press. A leading national paper writes about a "deepening resentment" of the American presence and a "growing alienation" between Afghanistan and the United States. But the Afghans I met and large majorities of Afghans, according to public opinion polls, are grateful for the sacrifices we have made on their behalf and are convinced they can continue to transform their country with our continued support. Their polls show that 64 percent of the Afghan people believe there has been significant progress in security. U.S. polls show the opposite, the product of an unbalanced, negative view in our media.

The Afghans I met spoke with pride of the election they held on April 5, in which 7 million Afghans braved threats and violence to get to the polls, voting

at a higher rate than we achieve in our own elections. According to preliminary counts, more than 35 percent of the voters were women. This record vote was the culmination of a campaign in which the leading candidates held huge rallies, attended by tens of thousands of Afghans all over the country—including in areas that much of our press reports are controlled by the Taliban. All of the security for these events, and for the vote itself, was provided by Afghan forces. And every Afghan I spoke with said that he—or she—feels more secure today than a few years ago, in part because Afghan forces are providing security in Afghan cities and towns.

Although the vote was divided among a number of candidates and a run-off between Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Ghani will occur, Afghans say the act of voting itself sent a message that Afghans reject the Taliban and what it stands for. Our intelligence sources indicate that the Taliban leadership is concerned by its inability to disrupt the election and prevent Afghans from getting to the polls.

So, far from what we may read in much of our press, the Afghan people conveyed to me their optimism regarding their country's significant progress, their desire for democracy, and their gratitude for the assistance of the United States over the past decade.

In Ukraine, I met with Acting President Turchinov, Prime Minister Yatsenyuk, Defense Minister Koval, National Security and Defense Council Head Parubiy, and numerous other government officials, activists, and participants in the political process. Ukrainians faced down the heavily armed security forces of a corrupt, repressive regime on the Maidan—their Independence Square—while they themselves armed with little more than rocks, tires, and sandbags. Now they face an even greater challenge in the form of tens of thousands of Russian troops massed on their borders. Already, the Russians have annexed Crimea and Russian Special Operations forces have organized sympathizers to occupy buildings in a number of Eastern Ukrainian cities and towns in an effort to disrupt and destabilize the government, make an election on May 25 difficult to organize, and establish a basis for Russian occupation or a Russian-oriented breakaway State.

In the face of these challenges, the Ukrainians I met expressed gratitude for the solidarity and support our country has shown through the dark days of the Yanukovich regime and into the challenges they face today. They expressed their support for our values and their strong desire to be a part of the democratic West, rather than the authoritarian sphere of Putin's Russia and its allies. And they asked for our support in their effort to stabilize their country, fend off the Russian challenge, and hold free and fair elections as scheduled.